

TEETHING

Introduction

The first teeth (also known as milk teeth) have usually developed before the child is born.

They normally start to break through the gum from at around six to nine months old. Most children will have around eight teeth by their first birthday. The full set of first teeth is usually through by the age of two and a half years.

Teething can start as early as 3 months and continue to 3 years old.

Rarely, your child may be born with one or two teeth or will have a tooth emerge within the first few weeks of life. This does not give cause for concern unless the teeth interfere with feeding.

Symptoms

- pain
- swollen gums
- red, hot cheeks
- excessive dribbling
- nappy rash
- changes to sleep pattern
- and/or appetite increased tendency to chew objects
- general irritability

Treatment

There are several things that you can try to help relieve the discomfort of teething:

- Rub a small amount of infant teething gel onto the affected gum area with a clean finger and gently massage it into the gums. Some of these contain a mild local anaesthetic to dull the pain. Alternatively, use infant liquid paracetamol (e.g. Calpol).
- Your child may benefit from a homeopathic remedy such as chamomilla.
- A chilled teething ring may distract the child whilst helping to soothe their sore gums. Be sure to take the ring out of the freezer before it becomes rock hard to avoid bruising already sore gums. Never tie a teething ring around a baby's neck.
- Chewing on hard biscuits, frozen bananas or chilled raw carrot can help but should be given under careful supervision (in case a large piece breaks off in the mouth).

- Apply a little petroleum jelly or aqueous cream around the mouth and chin to prevent soreness from excessive dribbling and wipe your baby's face often with a cloth to remove the dribble and prevent rashes from developing.

Prevention

As soon as the first baby teeth begin to appear you should start to clean them.

At first you may find it easier to use a piece of clean gauze or cloth wrapped around your forefinger. As more teeth appear you will need to use a baby toothbrush. Once your child reaches two you should start to use fluoride toothpaste.

If you can, avoid using a dummy and discourage thumb sucking. These can both eventually cause problems as the teeth grow and develop. This may result in treatment with a brace when the child gets older.

Never dip your baby's dummy or teething ring into fruit syrups, honey, fruit juices or anything containing sugars, particularly at bedtime. Never add sugar to bottle feeds or use sugary drinks. Milk and water are the best drinks for teeth.

Encouraging your baby to drink from a cup can help prevent dental problems that can be caused by drinking from a bottle.

Try to get your baby to drink from a special cup by the time they are six months old, or when they are able to sit up and hold things on their own.